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ABSTRACT

This report addresses the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) from the American Association of Community Colleges, which seeks to enhance the capacity of targeted community colleges to expand access to postsecondary education and help foster regional economic development. The Ford Foundation has made a decade-long commitment to community colleges in distressed rural areas of the United States through RCCI. The underlying assumption is that rural community colleges must take a leading role in human capital development as well as economic development. Especially in distressed areas, the community college is often the institution best capable of initiating and nurturing the local partnerships and regional collaborations that can help solve critical community problems. The RCCI focus is on specific geographic regions--the Southeast, Deep South, Southwest, Appalachia, and western Indian reservations--where communities face out-migration and stagnant or declining economies. The nine pilot RCCI colleges initiated a variety of demonstration projects that sought to improve the economic environment in their communities and to enhance economic opportunities for their people. While differing according to the distinct context and assets of each community, these strategies shared the following themes: entrepreneurship and small business development programs; workforce training activities; leadership development programs; and partnerships and alliances for regional economic development. (JA)

PROJECT BRIEF

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

AACC-PB-98-2

RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE INITIATIVE II. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Ronald Eller, Rubén Martínez, Cynthia Pace,
Michael Pavel, Hector Garza, and Lynn Barnett*

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RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



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RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE INITIATIVE II. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Ronald Eller, Rubén Martínez, Cynthia Pace,
Michael Pavel, Hector Garza, and Lynn Barnett*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ford Foundation has made a decade-long commitment to community colleges in distressed rural areas of the United States through the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI). Through the initiative, the Foundation is seeking to enhance the capacity of targeted community colleges to expand access to postsecondary education and help foster regional economic development. The underlying assumption is that rural community colleges must take a leading role in human capital development as well as economic development. Especially in distressed areas, the community college is often the institution best capable of initiating and nurturing the local partnerships and regional collaborations that can help solve critical community problems. The RCCI focus is on specific geographic regions—the Southeast, Black Belt/Deep South, Southwest, Appalachia, and western Indian reservations—where communities face out-migration and stagnant or declining economies.

RCCI Pilot Colleges—SAMPLE STRATEGIES

*ALABAMA SOUTHERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE,
MONROEVILLE, ALABAMA*

Partnered with Ciba Chemicals to develop an associate degree in chemical technology, complete with industry internships.

*COAHAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE,
CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI*

Developed new relationships with regional business and industry leaders through an expanded Skill Tech Center.

FORT BELKNAP COLLEGE, HARLEM, MONTANA

Implemented plans to reach the global Native American arts and crafts market.

FORT PECK COMMUNITY COLLEGE, POPLAR, MONTANA
Strengthened a new Small Business Assistance Center through a mentoring relationship with another more established center.

HAZARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE, HAZARD, KENTUCKY
Created Leadership Roundtable and telecommunications consortia to help build regional civic capacity.

*NORTHERN NEW MEXICO COMMUNITY COLLEGE,
ESPAÑOLA, NEW MEXICO*

Partnered with US West and Los Alamos National Laboratory for growth in telecommunications capacity.

SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE, PABLO, MONTANA
Expanded work of its Tribal Business Information Center to support and track entrepreneurial success.

*SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE,
CUMBERLAND, KENTUCKY*

Established the Pine Mountain Community Development Corporation to facilitate entrepreneurial and small business development.

SOUTHWEST TEXAS JUNIOR COLLEGE, UVALDE, TEXAS
Invited university business schools to compete in an economic development case study to outline strategies for regional development.

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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The national demonstration program began in 1995 with nine RCCI pilot colleges that received Ford Foundation funding, along with technical assistance from MDC, Inc., a nonprofit organization specializing in workforce and economic development. This report is the second of four reports on the impact of RCCI involvement, prepared by the project's documentation and assessment team. Conclusions are based upon three years of field observations, site visits, interviews, focus group discussions, and other quantitative and qualitative data collected from the nine pilot colleges. The first report focused on access to postsecondary education; subsequent ones will cover team building and institutional capacity.

Findings

The nine pilot RCCI colleges initiated a variety of demonstration projects that seek to improve the economic environment in their communities and to enhance economic opportunities for their people. While differing according to the distinct context and assets of each community, these strategies share the following themes:

- ◇ entrepreneurship and small business development programs
- ◇ workforce training activities
- ◇ leadership development programs
- ◇ partnerships and alliances for regional economic development.

These demonstration projects mark an important departure for pilot RCCI colleges in their efforts to serve as catalysts for regional economic development. They are helping the colleges respond to changing community needs and move beyond traditional roles in vocational and pre-baccalaureate education. However, building sustainable rural economies, especially in regions of persistent distress, is a formidable challenge. For these and other rural community colleges to fulfill their potential as institutions for democratic change, they still must address three areas:

- ◇ poverty and rural development
- ◇ expansion of partnerships for regional development
- ◇ expansion of knowledge and institutional resources.

The RCCI pilot college experiences suggest that improvement of economic opportunities in rural distressed areas requires more than traditional job creation activities. Geographic and infrastructure challenges, poor social services, inadequate education, and historical patterns of exploitation have left these regions dependent and without the civic capital to build a sustainable economy. The politics of race, class, and ethnicity have further burdened their development. Yet a community's own assets—its “cultural capital”—can fuel economic development when development strategies respond to the needs of a particular place, its history and culture. The most effective practices among the RCCI pilot colleges go beyond traditional workforce training alliances with businesses and industries to stimulate indigenous entrepreneurial development and civic capacity.

This AACC Project Brief is based on a research report prepared by the authors, members of the Rural Community College Initiative Documentation and Assessment Team: Ronald Eller, director, Appalachia Center, University of Kentucky; Rubén Martínez, associate provost, University of Southern Colorado; Cynthia Pace, founder/senior partner, PACEMAKERS; Michael Pavel, assistant professor, Washington State University; Hector Garza, vice president, Access and Equity Programs, American Council on Education; and Lynn Barnett, director, Academic, Student, and Community Development, American Association of Community Colleges.

RCCI THE RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE INITIATIVE

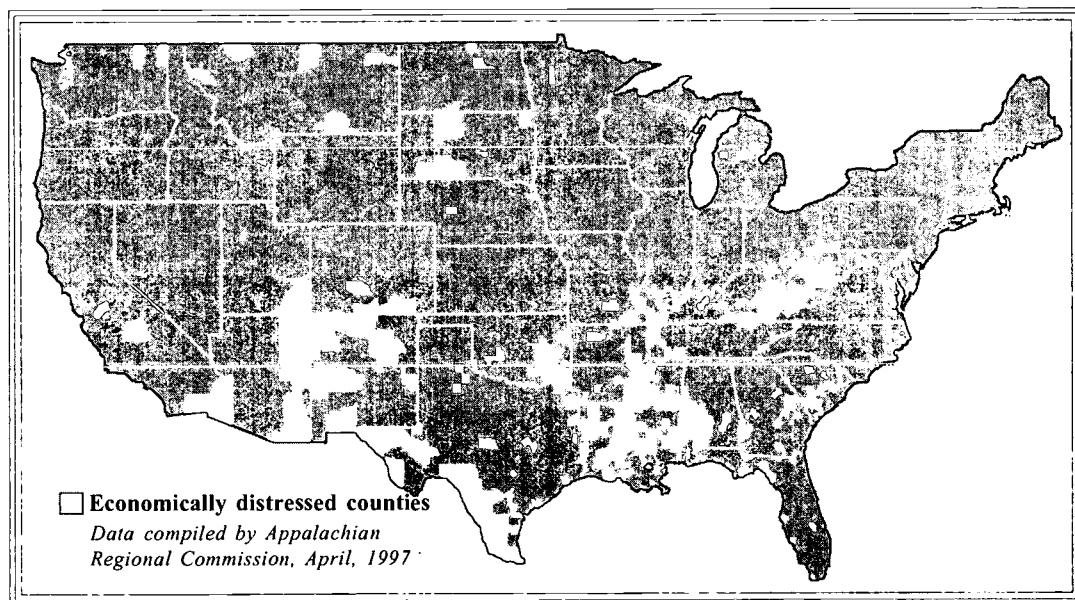
The Ford Foundation began the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) in 1993 to assist community colleges in four persistently distressed rural areas of the United States—the Southeast, Black Belt/Deep South, Southwest, Appalachia, and western Indian reservations. The RCCI program is designed to support colleges in those areas in developing effective practices that will bring significant positive change to the college and the community. Through RCCI, the Ford Foundation and its managing partner, MDC, Inc., encourage community colleges to establish sustainable programs that simultaneously (1) increase access to postsecondary education for traditionally underserved and disadvantaged populations and (2) foster economic development in rural areas.

This report examines some of the best of those local practices to improve economic development by nine pilot RCCI colleges. It focuses collectively on implications of the nine projects. Conclusions are based on three years of field observations, site visits, interviews, focus group discussions, and other quantitative and qualitative data.

ECONOMIES IN DISTRESSED RURAL AREAS

The economies of rural areas in the United States have long been shaped by a fundamental contradiction—poor people inhabiting rich lands. Many rural areas have been persistently plagued by cycles of poverty, unemployment, and economic decline. Although many rural communities have provided much of the nation's wealth in agriculture and natural resources, the wealth generated often has flowed elsewhere. Rich in the values of family, community, and tradition, rural peoples have seen their cultures frequently belittled and their communities decimated by job loss and depopulation. Some young people have left after graduating from high school or college because there were no jobs for them; others have forsaken secondary or postsecondary education altogether. Having provided a foundation for the nation's prosperity, rural residents often feel that they are a forgotten people.

This is especially true of the four distressed rural areas addressed by the RCCI pilot colleges. While each region has a distinct history and cultural heritage, individual economies have been shaped by common struggles. Each has suffered from inadequate physical infra-



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structure and social services, low levels of educational attainment, and heavy financial dependence on the government. Mechanization has caused unemployment and worker displacement. Each area has struggled with a sense of powerlessness that comes from absentee ownership of land and resources and single industry dominance of the local economy. The politics of race, class, and ethnicity have shaped the economies of these distressed rural regions in ways that have set them apart from the rest of the national experience.

Although Indian nations, for example, possess a history rich in economic self-sufficiency, today they are among the poorest peoples in the United States. Over time, Indian economic self-sufficiency has been replaced with dependence on federal programs and policies. The self-determination of the last century has been replaced with a culture of oppression and dependency. Today, the economic picture on many Indian reservations and rural distressed areas across the country looks particularly bleak. According

RCCI Pilot Colleges 1995-2000

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RCCI

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to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, unemployment rates hover around 50 percent on or near reservations and exceed 90 percent in some areas (Pavel and Timmons 1995). Similar conditions exist in other rural communities of the South and West. In 1996, persons of Hispanic origin had the highest poverty rates among non-Indians of any racial or ethnic group in the United States (29 percent), and the poverty rate among African-Americans was only slightly lower at 28 percent. In parts of Central Appalachia per capita income today averages less than 60 percent of national levels, and government transfer payments constitute almost 40 percent of total income (Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, *Pulling Apart*, 1997). Recent studies found that the income gap between the rich and poor in America, especially the rural poor, has widened substantially over the past two decades (CBPP, *Poverty Rate*, 1997).

CREATING JOBS AND INCREASING INCOMES WILL MEET IMMEDIATE NEEDS, BUT JOB CREATION THAT SUSTAINS THE LOCAL CULTURES, ENHANCES SELF-DETERMINATION, AND RE-INVESTS IN THE COMMUNITY HAS THE BEST LIKELIHOOD FOR LONG-TERM IMPACT.

Poor people in Appalachia, Chicanos in the Southwest, Native Americans, and generations of African-Americans in the South have learned to survive despite economic exploitation and the loss of self-determination. Each group has its own story of cultural persistence. Each has seen the gap widen between the prosperity of an expanding national economy and the distress of their forgotten communities.

Transforming these distressed rural economies requires more than traditional economic development strategies and workforce training programs that may have been tried in the past. Long histories of exclusion and economic exploitation have left many barriers to economic well-being. Cultural traditions that define individual worth and community wealth in ways different from mainstream culture also create challenges for education, entrepreneurial training, and economic planning not faced in middle-class white communities. In spite of the familiar call for “jobs, jobs, jobs,” the *types* of jobs created—and the manner in which they are developed—remain the most important long-term economic challenges. Creating jobs and increasing incomes will meet immediate needs, but job creation that sustains the local cultures, enhances self-determination, and re-invests in the community has the best likelihood for long-term impact.

RCCI AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

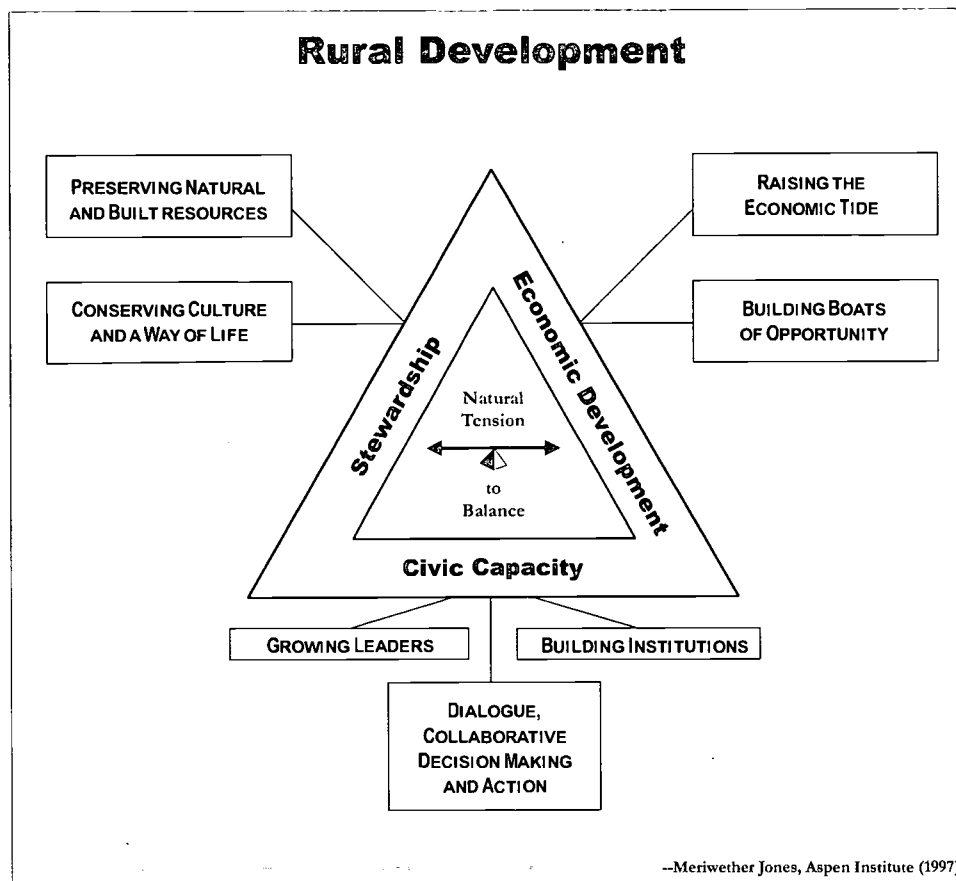
One of the RCCI goals is to encourage community colleges serving distressed rural regions to assume active leadership roles in their communities. RCCI not only challenges rural colleges to redefine the meaning of access and the delivery of educational programs but also calls for a reassessment of the colleges’ roles in and approaches to regional economic development. According to the RCCI conceptual framework, economic development means creating jobs, raising incomes, generating wealth, and reinvesting that wealth locally. This means more than starting, expanding, or recruiting businesses to the region. It means creating a “foundation for business development” that includes technology, capital, a high-quality labor force, and sound physical and civic infrastructures. Above all, economic development must be based upon local values (MDC, *Conceptual Framework*, 1996). Local values must shape the integration of the regional economy into the emerging global economy.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES CAN HELP THE COMMUNITY MAINTAIN BALANCE BETWEEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND STEWARDSHIP.

This approach is consistent with other theories of rural development that emphasize the importance of social or “civic” capital in sustaining economic development.

For example, Meriwether Jones of the Aspen Institute’s Rural Economic Policy Program links three key components: civic capacity, economic development, and stewardship. Civic capacity involves growing leaders, building institutions, and facilitating public dialogue

and collaborative decision making. Economic development means raising the economic tide and building “boats of opportunity” for everyone, while stewardship preserves resources and drives development using local values as a map. According to the Aspen model, community colleges can help the community maintain balance between economic development and stewardship (MDC, RCCI Leadership Workshop, 1997).



RCCI encourages colleges to implement a range of economic development strategies that include but move beyond traditional business development tactics. This may include a range of strategies: providing regional leadership for economic development; becoming a center for a regional workforce development system attuned to employers’ changing needs; promoting technology transfer and competitiveness; promoting entrepreneurship and small business development; targeting programs to poor people while creating jobs; and encouraging a strong education ethic.

This broader definition of economic development raises expectations for the community college to become a truly “community-building college”.

This broader definition of economic development raises expectations for the community college to become a truly “community-building college”—one that empowers the community to build sustainable economic activities while preserving its traditional cultural values. It requires the college to enhance internal capacities, establish new partnerships and, above all, to understand and value the cultural contexts in which the institution exists.

EFFECTIVE LOCAL PRACTICES

As a result of RCCI's extensive data gathering and strategic planning process, the nine pilot RCCI colleges initiated a variety of demonstration projects to improve the economic environment in their communities and enhance economic opportunities for their people. While differing according to the distinct context and assets of each community, these strategies share the following themes:

- ◇ entrepreneurship and small business development programs
- ◇ workforce training activities
- ◇ leadership development programs
- ◇ partnerships and alliances for regional economic development.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the economies of rural distressed areas is the relative absence of indigenous entrepreneurs and the paucity of capital available for development. Yet in rural areas where there are few mid-sized or large employers, small business development presents one of the greatest opportunities for economic growth. Community colleges throughout the nation have expanded their programming in entrepreneurial training and small business development over the past decades, but perhaps nowhere has this movement been more important than in distressed rural regions.

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Several of the RCCI pilot colleges had established small business development programs before the Ford initiative, but RCCI provided additional motivation and support for expansion and development of new approaches to entrepreneurial education and training. Both Hazard Community College in Eastern Kentucky and Northern New Mexico Community College had established small business development centers for their respective communities in the 1980s. Hazard's Business and Industry Technical Assistance Center expanded small business training courses to neighboring community colleges with RCCI support and initiated entrepreneurship programs in local high schools. The college also revised its business curriculum to include teaching strategies modeled after the REAL (Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning) program, which offers a hands-on approach to entrepreneurship training. At Northern New Mexico, with RCCI support, the Small Business Development Center established an artisan database to help local artisans expose their works to a broader market. The college has turned the database over to the local arts council to manage. The Center received a Rural Business Enterprise grant to provide technical assistance to artists and artisans and continues its work to develop local artisans as entrepreneurs.

At Southeast Community College in Kentucky, the RCCI program supported the creation of the Pine Mountain Community Development Corporation (PMCDC) in 1996 to facilitate entrepreneurial and small business development programs and to provide startup and expansion capital for local small businesses. The college's RCCI team recognized that entrepreneurial training and small business development were critical to community economic growth and that access to capital and technical support was crucial. The team created what was one of the first community college-based small business investment funds in the nation and the first multi-bank-funded community development corporation in Kentucky.

Some especially innovative and culturally conscious approaches to small business development are taking place in the tribal colleges. As in Appalachia, local micro-enterprises are seen to form the basis of future economic development on the reservations. The pilot tribal colleges promote entrepreneurship and support small businesses through entrepreneurship courses, degree programs, and technical assistance. Regardless of the approach, success seems to lie with the college's capacity to improve both individual and community well-being through culturally appropriate support for business development.

SOME ESPECIALLY INNOVATIVE AND CULTURALLY CONSCIOUS APPROACHES TO SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ARE TAKING PLACE IN THE TRIBAL COLLEGES.

One example is Salish Kootenai College's Tribal Business Information Center, where support for local values is at the heart of curriculum and outreach efforts that emphasize improving tribal member self-identity, self-concept, motivation, and outlook on life—all necessary prerequisites for entrepreneurial success. In its initial three years of operation, the Center has helped launch new businesses (including a restaurant) and develop cottage industries, enabling individuals to move from garage-type operations to buildings dedicated to their own businesses. The Center has documented 44 business startups, 38 business expansions, 15 clients moved off welfare, and more than 375 clients served—impressive numbers for a small community. The incorporation of Native views has been at the heart of Salish Kootenai's RCCI program. The Center is developing a unique management information system to track services provided and assess success based on quality of life criteria according the Native values as well as traditional economic indicators.

Fort Belknap College's Small Business Assistance Center has employed similar strategies to promote entrepreneurship. Students and other community residents are getting help with business plan development and loans of \$8,000–\$50,000 from a new tribal loan fund. Using RCCI and college resources, the Center has begun building a computer resource library that includes Internet access for tribal members. Ranchers and farmers are using the technology while learning accounting programs to run their businesses better. Center staff are tribal members, a factor that helps them gain the community's trust, increase client participation, and utilize the assets of the local culture to encourage entrepreneurship. A planned Art Cooperative will promote the unique tribal culture and open the way to the larger global Native American arts and crafts market through cooperative marketing. The Center uses a special curriculum, "Nx Level for Entrepreneurs," for its two-year entrepreneurship certificate. To promote new businesses and expansion, it is supporting a mini mall, print shop, accounting services, and ways to improve credit ratings of tribal members.

WORKFORCE TRAINING ACTIVITIES

In the years since World War II, community colleges have played an important role in developing the skilled workforce that has fueled American economic growth. Community colleges in distressed rural areas, however, have been slower to participate in recent business/industry partnerships, and for good reason. In many poor areas, due to the absence of a strong industrial economy, there has been little demand for advanced technical skills. As a result, the workforce in many poor communities lacks both basic education and the advanced training necessary to participate fully in the present or future economy. RCCI, however, encourages member colleges to assume active roles in developing a skilled and flexible regional workforce. Partnerships with local businesses and industries encourage colleges to offer basic education and advanced technical training for workers and organizational training for managers. Pilot colleges have responded to this challenge in a variety of ways, expanding efforts begun before RCCI and launching new initiatives.

Alabama Southern Community College (ASCC) established two workforce development partnerships through Vision 2020, a community development strategy for southwest Alabama. Vision 2020 became a focal point of Alabama Southern's RCCI program, effectively linking access and economic development goals through integrated programs to build a technically competent regional workforce. Stimulated by RCCI, the college initiated two programs that epitomize the dual goals. In a partnership with Ciba Chemicals, Inc., the college offers 20 students annually a mix of scholarships, internships, and employment through its new the Ciba Chemical Program. Students complete an Associate's degree in Chemical Technology at ASCC, intern at Ciba, and then gain employment. In a partnership with Auburn University, ASCC created the Center for Excellence in Forestry, Paper, and Chemical Technology to serve industries through technical training and technology transfer. ASCC coordinates all training. The Center is viewed as connecting the "heart and soul" of the community.

Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC) has achieved important successes through workforce training programs and continues to expand an existing Tech Prep program, launched before RCCI, to meet increased demands generated by its successes. As a result of its RCCI participation, SWTJC hired an industry coordinator to assess the work needs of employers and coordinate the development of relevant curricula to meet those needs. Since the beginning in 1995, the program has grown steadily and continues to offer short-term courses for employees and custom-tailored programs for industry.

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INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS.

RCCI has help Northern New Mexico Community College (NNMCC) expand regional vocational training through on its two campuses and is aiding the process of further expanding course offerings in telemedicine through distance education. The college has signed a contract with Ganados del Valle, a weaving cooperative, to deliver through various means traditional and customized coursework to its employees. Additionally, NNMCC is implementing a new Economic Development Administration Small Business Development grant to build a high technology manufacturing training facility at its Española campus.

The facility—which will house, among other things, a cleanroom, a robotics laboratory, and two classrooms—will be shared with Santa Fe Community College and Luna Vocational Technical Institute in New Mexico. The facility also will serve as a business incubator and will train a labor force that should attract manufacturing industries to the region.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

RCCI workshops and leadership institutes have led to a growing awareness of the relationship between economic development and community development through civic leadership. Only one of the pilot colleges—Hazard Community College—included civic leadership in its initial proposal to the Ford Foundation, but several other colleges have since initiated local community leadership programs to enhance and expand the quality of civic leadership. Recognizing that job creation and the reinvestment of wealth are linked to the quality of civic leadership, they established programs to encourage civic participation, cooperation, trust, and commitment among diverse interest groups within their communities. Broadening the base of community leadership and encouraging citizens to work together for common goals has become an important part of their overall economic development strategy.

The Hazard RCCI team recognized early the importance of regional leadership and created a Leadership Roundtable. The Roundtable encouraged the creation of the Eastern Kentucky Women in Leadership Program (EKWIL), which offers personal and business advancement through seminars and workshops. The Kentucky Council of Area Development Districts now administers EKWIL.

Southeast Community College recognized the need for a campus-based leadership program as part of its efforts to establish the Pine Mountain Community Development Corporation. In response to concerns of local community leaders, the college established the Leadership Harlan County United program, which grooms new leadership through an eight-month leadership academy for young professionals. Fourteen individuals completed the program in 1997, participating in workshops on topics such as governance, social services, education, community health, and politics.

Alabama Southern Community College has partnered with the area Chamber of Commerce to sponsor Leadership Now, a similar leadership development program for civic and emerging business leaders. Focus is on developing ideas that will not only assist the economic growth of the community but also improve its quality of life.

At Northern New Mexico Community College, campus leaders are interested in expanding community capacity among local people to develop consensus on important community and regional issues. A college-sponsored economic development summit brought influential leaders together to discuss economic development issues. An important result was a commitment to develop a Leadership Institute to facilitate leadership training for more people and increase the region's human capital.

Southwest Texas Junior College has followed a similar strategy to promote coordinated planning at the regional level and to bring persons together in a meaningful dialogue on development, increasing its ties with leadership circles in southwest Texas. The president is more active on local boards, and senior administrators and faculty are actively encouraged to serve the community. Through a unique competitive case study approach, SWTJC invited graduate business students from seven participating universities to propose alternative strategies for the economic development of the region that local leaders can consider for implementation. The March 1998 competition tapped local business acumen and helped identify emerging business opportunities.

PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES FOR REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Many distressed rural communities find it a challenge to create partnerships among regional institutions, business interests, and political leaders, often due to turf and resource protection and differing values. Pilot RCCI colleges have begun building local alliances for economic development by overcoming old barriers and fostering cooperative values. A side benefit, in the long run, however, may be the impact of these contributions to the vitality of the communities' civic structures.

Southeast Community College's Pine Mountain Community Development Corporation is a good example of such an alliance, which brings together the college and five area banks. Although the resources invested by the banks are still relatively small, the corporation represents the first significant partnership between the banking community and higher education in this part of Appalachia. It has opened the door to other collaborations, including scholarships and leadership programs. As a result of RCCI efforts at Hazard Community College, the Eastern Kentucky Telecommunications and Technology Consortium was established among a number of regional education institutions. Now coordinated by the Rural Economic Development Center in Somerset, Kentucky, the consortium co-sponsored a technology conference and a survey of existing telecommunications technologies in the region.

Southwest Texas Junior College's Tech Prep program, Alabama Southern's Vision 2020 initiative, and the Skill Tech Center at Coahoma Community College in Mississippi all have

opened up new relationships with regional business and industry leaders that have led to greater cooperation for community economic development.

Northern New Mexico Community College has partnered with US West and the Los Alamos National Laboratories. These partnerships have provided the college with technical support for telecommunications planning and for the development of its regional Artisan Database. In addition, RCCI efforts at Northern New Mexico, in collaboration with Santa Fe Community College and the University of New Mexico, have leveraged a substantial new grant from the Microsoft Corporation to train students for the information technology industry in the region. In time, this strategy of building external relationships will encourage sustainable collaborations among agencies, businesses, governmental entities, and educational institutions serving these regions.

Tribal colleges have formally linked their campus business information assistance centers through a new Montana Tribal Business Information Network that serves the state's seven tribal campus centers. Members share resources, information, and economic development strategies in monthly meetings and weekly conference calls. The Network represents an important symbol of cooperation among geographically isolated and historically separate reservations.

Local RCCI programs also have opened new avenues of cooperation between the college and other community development agencies. The new Fort Belknap Small Business Assistance Center, for example, now coordinates programming with a more established center, the Bear Paw Development Corporation, and receives important mentoring on running a small business development center. As a result, the Center has broadened its own capacities in entrepreneurial training, financial assistance, and technical support and strengthened its pool of speakers, role models, and mentors.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES

These demonstration projects mark an important departure for pilot RCCI colleges in their efforts to serve as catalysts for community economic development. They are helping the colleges respond to changing community needs and move beyond traditional roles in vocational and pre-baccalaureate education. However, building sustainable rural economies, especially in regions of persistent distress, is a formidable task. Several challenges remain to be overcome if these and other rural community colleges are to fulfill their potential as institutions for democratic change. They are:

- ◇ poverty and rural development
- ◇ expanding partnerships for regional development
- ◇ expanding knowledge and institutional resources.

POVERTY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Transforming rural economies requires fundamental changes in the social and economic structures that keep people poor and limit democratic processes. In part, this means encouraging alternative forms of economic development such as small businesses and high-tech training, or the growth of new civic capital and revitalized institutions. It also means breaking down social barriers to help ethnic minority, working class, and poor people enjoy economic growth and social mobility.

**IN REGIONS ADDRESSED BY THE
RCCI INITIATIVE, CULTURE AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HAVE
BEEN INEXTRICABLY TIED TOGETHER.**

RCCI pilot colleges have strengthened their roles in promoting community cooperation, partnerships, and civic leadership. But strategies that build bridges of opportunity for the *rural poor* have proven to be more elusive. With few exceptions, the economic development strategies have taken traditional approaches and targeted poor people only indirectly. Although it can be argued that the majority of the students in these colleges are poor—and that helping the poor is a feature already extant in their operations—few of the new programs address head-on the historical social and cultural barriers to economic success.

In regions addressed by the RCCI initiative, culture and economic development have been inextricably tied together. Economic growth in the past has functioned primarily for the benefit of the “village middle class” rather than the rural poor (Eller 1982; Eller, Jenks, Jasparro, and Napier 1994). The working class and poor may cling to a more traditional, less ambitious economic world view that values “enough” rather than “more”, and values emotional satisfaction over addiction to work and accumulation of wealth or goods. Among some people, economic hard times have fostered an aggressive individualism that can undercut social responsibility and the common good. Among others, welfare dependency has led to a decline of self-confidence and personal responsibility. Effective community development requires an integrated strategy that empowers all individuals to fulfill their potential and to engage in a collective dialogue about the common community good.

Higher education institutions are still alien institutions for some ethnic minority and working class people. Despite open access policies at community colleges, institutional structures and procedures often are geared toward middle class values that inhibit the educational success of the poor. Vocational education may be geared more to meeting business needs than to student development. Programs may not empower lower and working class students to participate fully in a democratic workplace. Economic development strategies that promote development of the whole community require special sensitivity. Some students’ own cultural backgrounds may conflict with many mainstream economic practices. Assumptions about entrepreneurship, leadership, accumulation, ambition, and private ownership, for example, may conflict with some traditional values. Community colleges, as democratic institutions, should nevertheless provide opportunities for all students to seek economic security for themselves within the context of their own cultures.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMS, THEREFORE, NEED TO
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE “CULTURAL
CAPITAL” EXISTING WITHIN
COMMUNITIES.**

Addressing rural economic development from this perspective is not impossible, as RCCI colleges have shown. Entrepreneurial training on the tribal campuses draws upon the cultural assets of Indian students to build the confidence and skills necessary for successful small business development. Salish Kootenai College staff have helped a tribal member establish a river rafting company that focuses on tourism while incorporating local history lessons by tribal elders. At Northern New Mexico Community College, the curriculum includes courses on traditional weaving techniques and Spanish colonial furniture making. By allowing culture to help shape job creation strategies, these colleges are building community capacity to sustain valued ways of life.

Economic development programs, therefore, need to take advantage of the “cultural capital” existing within communities. Effective strategies need to be culturally appropriate to place and community, taking advantage of the cultural and natural assets and encouraging confidence in the accumulation of wealth within the context of community values and traditions. There is no single economic solution in the RCCI areas. The most effective practices are those in tune with local culture; they may range from high-tech manufacturing to small business expansion and even to the recovery of local craft traditions.

EXPANDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

While RCCI has encouraged participating colleges to pursue aggressive roles in establishing partnerships for regional economic development, rural distressed areas continue to suffer from a lack of collaboration and planning. In many rural communities economic growth continues to be spontaneous and unplanned. Politicians and economic power brokers often are reluctant to invite new players to the table, and public agencies and non-profit organizations—caught up in their own struggles for survival—are slow to create effective coalitions for change.

AT THE SAME TIME, COLLEGES MUST MAINTAIN THEIR POSITIONS AS DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. THEY MUST MEDIATE AMONG SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS AND HELP PRESERVE THE CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS OF THE COMMUNITY.

RCCI pilot colleges have begun to build a better environment for cooperation by initiating relationships with businesses and banks, offering employee training for industry, and establishing networks among schools and colleges. Expansion of such partnerships and development of a culture of collaboration will require additional initiatives. Work must be done to build trust among organizations, establish common goals, and attract new resources and people. College administrators and faculty must view participation on a regional board or community economic development committee as a natural extension of their roles as community educators. The mission of a small business development center must become an integral part of the campus curriculum, and partnerships with non-profit organizations representing the poor must become as common as collaborations with business and industry.

At the same time, colleges must maintain their positions as democratic institutions. They must mediate among special interest groups and help preserve the cultural and economic rights of the community. This may mean working with small businesses to develop marketing networks and production clusters, and it may mean collaborating with nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and businesses to help move people from welfare to work with dignity and compassion. Improvements will require community colleges in poor areas to step further outside of the classroom and to move beyond partnerships for job creation alone in order to build a culture of cooperation—and one that is inclusive and capable of sustaining long-term development. Above all, it will require more collaboration with four-year colleges and universities, and state and federal agencies.

EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

The challenge of changing rural institutions and economics is understandably an overwhelming one to educators traditionally bound to the classroom. Yet the RCCI goals invite college presidents and teams to rethink old assumptions, envision new possibilities for their communities and institutions, and design action-oriented programs that will transform both with minimal resources. To do so, they need a range and depth of knowledge about economic alternatives and the cultures of their communities.

Outside consultants and site visits to other regions have increased the teams' economic development knowledge base and provided a comparative basis for measuring their own progress. Further growth will come from self-reflection and more knowledge about economic development strategies, the relationship between economic development and community development, and the cultural conflicts inherent in change itself. Economic development requires conceptual clarity as well as concrete goals.

Expanding knowledge and program initiatives to become community-building institutions requires the continued growth of resources. Rural community colleges have long been

under-funded and their role in regional development unappreciated. Although RCCI has increased the colleges' capacity to raise external funds, implementation is a major challenge to staff; burnout can jeopardize an institution's success. For most rural community colleges, community needs are greater than current resources. Colleges must sustain their new roles as catalysts for community-based solutions and find the resources to adequately support new programs, faculty, and staff.

LESSONS LEARNED

Improving economic opportunities in rural distressed areas requires that leaders do more than the traditional job creation activities of the past. They must nurture their own "cultural capital" that can fuel economic development, designing strategies that respond to the needs of their particular place and its history and culture.

The most effective practices among the RCCI pilot colleges go beyond traditional, and important, workforce training alliances with businesses and industries to enhance indigenous entrepreneurial development and civic capacity. These practices recognize the cultural differences within communities and build upon the cultural assets of ethnic minority, working class, and poor people. This approach works when the college is an integral part of the whole community and not just responsive to just some of its members.

COLLEGE LEADERS MUST UNDERSTAND THAT TRANSFORMING THE RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTO A CATALYST FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS A PROCESS AND NOT JUST A LIST OF PROJECTS.

Tribal colleges, perhaps as a result of their unique situation, may offer the best examples of this integration. Giving close attention to the incorporation of Indian values and local traditions of the locality in entrepreneurial training, they are building economic capacity from community strengths rather than deficiencies. They promote economic self-determination without destroying traditional culture. Above all, they work at being inclusive and sharing the resources that come their way.

Partnerships and collaboration are absolutely vital to effective community development, but organizations and agencies serving distressed rural communities have little historical experience working together and creating sustainable partnerships. The political culture in these communities may not support an environment of cooperation within bureaucracies and across class and racial lines. Community colleges can play an important role in developing these linkages and relationships, but building a cooperative environment requires time, leadership, and political skill. College presidents must maintain active roles on state and regional economic development boards, commissions, and other development organizations, and college faculty must consider civic participation as an extension of their own educational roles.

Creating partnerships and a culture of cooperation requires a holistic understanding of the community and of economic development. This means working at both the macro-economic and the micro-economic levels to promote change. Developing partnerships with other colleges and universities, major businesses, and governmental organizations encourages strategic regional planning to address economic weaknesses. On the other hand, attention to individuals, families, and communities also is important: partnerships with schools, social service agencies, and non-profit community organizations can help widen avenues for social mobility, pride, and self-confidence. Community colleges are ideally situated to serve as a link between the two levels of community development. They can help by facilitating forums and workshops, sponsoring guest speakers and site visits, and encouraging faculty and staff to rethink curricula and teaching styles.

College leaders must understand that transforming the rural community college into a catalyst for economic development is a process and not just a list of projects. Rural communities differ dramatically. In the course of the RCCI process, visions change, knowledge grows, and strategies evolve to meet new contexts and understanding. Campus leaders must be committed to sustaining the process as an integral part of a new institutional culture.

RCCI has helped member colleges move beyond simply preparing students for jobs. Increasingly, participating colleges are taking active roles in creating environments that promote sustainable, long-term economic development. Although they differ according to strategies and stage of development, they are building connections and becoming part of a more comprehensive social force for community renewal.

GUIDELINES FOR CHANGE

- ◇ VIEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AS PART OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.
- ◇ USE LOCAL CULTURAL VALUES TO ENVISION LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TO SHAPE ITS INTEGRATION INTO THE GLOBAL ECONOMY.
- ◇ CREATE JOBS THAT SUSTAIN THE LOCAL CULTURE AND RE-INVESTS IN THE COMMUNITY.
- ◇ CONSIDER NEW APPROACHES TO ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING.
- ◇ FOSTER A CLIMATE OF INNOVATION TO SPARK LOCAL SOLUTIONS.
- ◇ BUILD CIVIC CAPACITY BY GROWING LEADERS AND ENCOURAGING COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING.
- ◇ MENTOR NEW GENERATIONS OF LEADERS.
- ◇ DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD A FLEXIBLE REGIONAL WORKFORCE.
- ◇ PROMOTE REGIONAL DIALOGUES ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.
- ◇ ENCOURAGE COORDINATED PLANNING AT REGIONAL LEVELS.

RCCI

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